

Geographies of Science and Religion: Catholics, the British Association and Repeal Agitation in Cork (1843)

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This paper examines the first and only visit to Cork, Ireland, in 1843 of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS). Although meetings were supposed to be free from political and religious concerns, this was far from the case in Cork: rumours of repeal agitation, partisan political-religious commentary from the visiting members, or even hints of a connection between the BAAS and the local campaign for a secular Queen's College, helped to tarnish the Association's reputation, and render the meeting a disaster. This paper sheds light on an important episode in the Association's history. It also builds on recent work in historical geography, which is sensitive to the role that place and particular social spaces play in mediating science-religion relations. The paper also advances a number of arguments. First, Associational science and its related activities were always 'geographically contingent', and the towns and cities in which the BAAS met played a key role in shaping proceedings and, in turn, how science-religion relations were discussed or contested. Second, the Association's claim to impartiality had a geography, and in unfamiliar Cork, away from the comfortable confines of Oxford or Edinburgh, it is clear that what the leaders considered as objective, was really tainted by liberal Anglicanism.

Keywords: Cork; British Association for the Advancement of Science; Repeal; Science and Religion; Geography of Speech.

The British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) was one of Victorian Britain's most illustrious scientific organisations, assembling each year in a different town or city across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and later, in other parts of the Empire. Formed in 1831, the BAAS was the 'great travelling congress', and played an important role in fostering the sciences through its Sections, or departments (MacLeod 1981, p.23). Its meetings, particularly in the early years of its history, were not always well attended and frequently the Association did not generate sufficient income to cover costs. On both these counts, the BAAS's least successful meeting in the first half of the nineteenth century was its visit to Cork City in 1843, when the disastrous turnout and limited financial returns threatened to bankrupt the fledgling institution. The poor attendance was attributed in part to local concerns over the political situation in 1840s Ireland, as the largely Catholic Irish Repeal Association marched throughout Ireland, demanding the removal of the Act of Union. Despite the fact that the Repeal agitation did not directly surface during the meeting, its presence was felt and

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the political and religious geographies of 1840s Cork played a significant role in shaping the BAAS's visit to the city. In fact, more than any other meeting in the nineteenth century, the Cork meeting throws into sharp relief the political and religious character of the Association in its early years.

From its inception, the British Association promoted itself as – and was often described as – a non-partisan body. Indeed, its founders enshrined this principle into its unofficial constitution: the discussion of political and religious topics during meetings was prohibited. The BAAS was secured as a rhetorical space, or set of spaces, conditioned by social norms and rules that controlled, or placed limits upon, what could be said or heard during its meetings (Toal 2012a). Wherever the Association met, they established a particular type of 'speech space' that sought to regulate the communication of science and strip it of any potential for controversy (Livingstone 2007, p.71, see also Finnegan 2011a). Of course, the aspirations of the founders rarely played out in practice, and the Association was frequently embroiled in sensation. In Cork, for example, commentators were quick to note that political and religious rhetoric – frequently pro-Union and liberal Anglican – punctuated addresses, public meetings and discussions, and many local nationalists were upset by what they regarded as the highly partisan complexion of the BAAS's 'speech space'.

The reality that Associational meetings were always locally constructed and mediated, and that *where* the BAAS met significantly shaped the events, debates, discussions, or even the type of sciences that took prominence, has gained traction, drawing heavily on work in historical geography (Livingstone 2003, Finnegan 2008, Livingstone and Withers 2011). Withers, in particular, has added empirical and theoretical depth to our understanding of Associational meetings as 'geographically constituted', highlighting how mobility was central to the BAAS's very mission of 'bringing science to the provinces', and how the places it visited shaped the agenda and character of proceedings. (Withers 2010a, 2011) Local geology and natural history always featured prominently in the Sections, while local social, scientific and religious actors of groups – for example, evangelicals at the 1864 Bath meeting – had a profound effect on the tone and direction of discussions (Toal 2012b). Further, BAAS meetings were 'made' in distinct material and social spaces – discreet venues, and regulated events – across the towns and cities the Association met in, and these, too, had a complex geography (Withers *et al.* 2008, Withers 2010a, 2010b). The BAAS's very enterprise was shaped by geography.

Alongside this work on the spatial dimensions of associational science, we can add a growing body of scholarship on the historical geographies of both science and science and religion (Livingstone 1994, Livingstone 2007, Dixon 2010). In short: place, and particular social spaces, make a difference to how encounters between science and religion play out. National, regional and urban settings, for example, have proven to be material in the relative acceptance or rejection of Darwinian evolution (Livingstone 2003), while particular sites – from the lecture hall to public theatre – have been used to articulate differing relations

between science and religion (see Finnegan 2011a, 2011b, Toal 2013). Indeed, the possibility of mapping an urban geography of science-religion relations – the particular sites and settings that enable or constrain interactions – has been raised (Toal forthcoming).

Building on this scholarship, this paper will flesh out our understanding of the geographical dimensions of science-religion relations in the BAAS in Ireland. Throughout, it will explore the politico-religious rhetoric within and around the different spaces of the meeting and uncover the way in which the relationship between science and religion was locally constructed and contested. At the same time, it will respond to Thomas Dixon's call for greater recognition of the importance of 'pre-existing political contexts' when thinking about the interactions between science and religion (Dixon 2010, pp.8-9). As we will see, politics and religion were intertwined for the visiting men of science, and there was concern at the prospect of the unionist *and* Protestant BAAS visiting nationalist *and* Catholic Cork.

In examining the BAAS in Cork, this paper will also re-evaluate the close connection between the local invitation to the British Association and the wider campaign for establishment of the Queen's College in Munster, shedding further light on the relationship between Queen's College Cork (QCC) and leading members of the Royal Cork Institution (Adelman 2009).

Science in Cork and the campaign for the Queen's Colleges

The decision to have 'Cork fixed as the next meeting place for the British Association' was taken on the evening of Monday 7th March 1842 by the managers of the Royal Cork Institution (RCI) (RCI Minute Book, 7th March 1842). That same night, a committee of gentlemen was established to request the BAAS's presence and to make arrangements for the visit. The RCI was one of three scientific societies in Cork City, the other two being the Cork Cuvierian Society (CCS) and the Cork Scientific and Literary Society (CSLS). Founded in 1803 by the Unitarian Reverend Thomas Hincks, and supported until the 1830s by an annual government grant of £2000, the RCI was, for the first half of the nineteenth century, Cork's pre-eminent scientific body (MacSweeney and Reilly 1958, D'Alton 1980, Adelman 2009). Juliana Adelman has shown that both the CCS and the CSLS were offspring of the RCI, and were established in the 1830s as the RCI's annual grant was rescinded (Adelman 2009). The RCI supported a thriving, melioristic middle class population and the success of the society was credited to its 'studious avoidance of giving it even the appearance of being identified with any religious or political party' (MacSweeney and Reilly 1958, p.25).

Cork County was dominated by Catholics, yet early nineteenth-century Cork City had a heterogeneous religious population which, in 1843, included Scots Connection Presbyterians, Independents, Unitarians, Primitive Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists, New Connection Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Roman Catholics – all this in a city of little more than 80,000 people (D'Alton 1980). The city's different denominations had a history of fragmentation and

schism, and it is perhaps little surprise that the exclusion of political and religious issues as topics of discussion was a theme for much of Cork's early nineteenth-century scientific societies (Adelman 2009). For example, at RCI meetings 'religious and political discussions [were] forbidden,' as the object of the society was the 'more general diffusion of scientific information [and] the promotion of a friendly intercourse between such persons as feel a pleasure and take interest in the advancement of science'. Reflecting on the fiftieth anniversary of the RCI, the Rev. Hincks attributed the success of the institution to its political and religious neutrality; it had 'obtained a much more general support' than possible under a 'different course' (MacSweeney and Reilly 1958, p.25). In Cork, Mayor North Ludlow Beamish's address to the CSLS in 1835 explicitly upheld the tradition of creating a non-partisan rhetorical space for science. To Beamish these meetings, 'composed of individuals of various religious creeds, political opinions and professional pursuits' and 'united here for one common object – the acquisition of knowledge', had helped to remove the 'prejudices and petty jealousies which', he regretted, 'were found to exist even in some cultivated minds'.

Similarly, in 1837, during the closing address of the CSLS Beamish, again, praised the 'admirable discretion and delicacy' in 'avoiding party politics, religious controversy and personal allusions' on the part of all the attending savants (U140/Day, Dowden papers, Cork Archives Institute). The success of the CSLS's meetings was directly attributed to the avoidance of political and religious statements, and the regulation of a speech space free from politico-religious strife.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the scientific men of Cork, many of whom were members of all three societies, invited the BAAS to Cork in 1842. Certainly, they agreed with Rev. Vernon Harcourt's 1831 suggestion, at the Association's first meeting, that nothing would be more 'destructive' to the institution than the introduction of religious and political topics (Morrell and Thackray 1981, p.229). Both organisations saw value in carving out a non-partisan rhetorical space within which to discuss and debate science. Yet aspiring to non-partisanship does not mean that there was civic-religious harmony; indeed, 1840s Cork City was characterised, O'Brien argues, by a tension between an emerging Catholic middle class population and an entrenched Protestant elite (O'Brien 1980, Eagleton, 1998). Moreover, the Protestant minority was far from uniform, and there were real differences between the anti-Repeal caste-orientated elitist rural Protestants and urban Protestant merchants (D'Alton 1980).

Of course, neither the shared commitment to the exclusion of political and religious topics, nor even the desire to promote Cork City, is enough to explain fully the RCI's invitation to the British Association. Also relevant is the RCI's role as the organising body at the heart of the campaign for the establishment of the 'Godless' Queen's College Cork (QCC). What is argued here is that the QCC campaign was a key motivating factor in inviting the BAAS to Cork (Pettit 1977, Clifford 1992, Murphy 1995). Some background on this QCC campaign is thus vital in order to understand why the invitation was made.

At a national level, the formation of the Select Committee on Education (Ireland) 1835-1838, led by Thomas Wyse, was a crucial step in the campaign for the establishment of the Queen's College at Cork. Wyse, a moderate Whig

Unionist, was the MP for Waterford (1835-1847) and one of the first Catholics to be admitted to Trinity College, Dublin (Moody and Beckett 1959). Wyse's political passions revolved around Irish educational reform. To him, Britain owed a debt to Ireland, whom she had 'plundered of knowledge' and 'defrauded of civilisation'. The Select Committee's findings, known as the Wyse Report, recommended a four-tier educational system for Ireland. Each parish was to have its own primary school; each county a secondary school; each province its own college, with supplementary education provided by scientific societies, including the RCI (Moody and Beckett 1959). The recommendations were aimed at the middle-classes and the colleges were to be free from religious tests (Murphy 1995). Wyse was associated with the London University whose ethos of practical scientific education in engineering and medicine without religious test had been branded 'Godless' by Matthew Arnold (Pettit 1977, p.3).

The recommendations of the Wyse Report were key to the establishment of the Munster Provincial College Committee (MPCC). This was the main lobby for the University at Cork, and the Committee organised a memorial to the Queen and petitions to the House of Commons and the House of Lords as part of their campaign (Moody and Beckett 1959). Importantly, James Roche chaired both the MPCC and the 1842 meeting of the RCI, when the decision to invite the BAAS was taken (Murphy 1995). Indeed, as early as 1836 ten resolutions had been passed by the newly formed MPCC with the fifth resolution envisioning Cork City's scientific and literary institutions providing a 'suitable basis for the formation of a provincial college for Munster' (Clifford 1992, p.43).

Denis Brennan Bullen, who along with Roche and Wyse attended the BAAS meeting at Cork, further consolidates the link between the BAAS, the RCI and the establishment of QCC. Bullen had authored a pamphlet arguing for a 'secular collegiate' as early as 1829 and was lecturer in Chemistry in the RCI in the 1830s (Pettit 1977, Murphy 1995). He had provided lengthy evidence to the Wyse Committee and he was on the MPCC, and eventually became the first Professor of Surgery and Dean of Medicine in QCC. Again, there was a degree of overlap between the RCI and QCC. Giving evidence to the Wyse Committee on the character of a new college, he noted: 'I am afraid if we have anything whatever to do with theology, dissension will ensue'; he continued, 'I think it would not serve the institution to give it in any way a religious character' (Reports of Select Committee on Foundation Schools and Education in Ireland, Together with the Minutes of Evidence, p.338). Further, Bullen saw the establishment of a College as a positive step in uniting political opponents:

by bringing together the better classes of all sects and fusing them together, instead of having them arrayed in sectarian hostility to each other as they are at present, and diverting the mind from political agitation, holding out new sources of occupation, and new channels into which the intellectual powers of the country might be directed (Reports of Select Committee on Foundation Schools and Education in Ireland, p.347).

Bullen was heavily involved in the Statistical Section of the BAAS at Cork; unsurprisingly, given his secular views, he was engaged in ‘a long and very interesting discussion’ on the ‘power to take the education of the children out of the hands of the clergy’ (*Cork Examiner*, 23 August 1843, n.p.). His comments during the proceedings of the Statistical Section support the view that he saw the visit as an opportunity to reinforce the case for the establishment of a non-denominational College in Cork. For example, his paper drew attention to:

the want that existed in this country of places of public instruction for the middle classes. The aristocracy had the University, but the middle classes had no such institution [...], places of public instruction in the country could never be prosperous or efficient if left to the support of voluntary contributions; they should be supported by a compulsory tax, or they could never go on (*The Southern Reporter*, 22 August 1843, n.p.).

Clearly, the establishment of the University was a passionate cause for many RCI members, particularly Roche, Bullen and Wyse. The overlap between Munster College agitators, RCI membership and the hosts for the British Association lends further support to the idea that the invitation to the BAAS by the RCI was a deliberate attempt to promote Cork science and strengthen the campaign for the establishment of QCC. MacSweeney and Reilly (1958) further note that in the history of the RCI, ‘as late as 1843 an attempt was made to interest the public and the government in its present state and its “advancement”’. They allude not only to the BAAS’s visit, but also to the use of the same visit to extend ‘the usefulness of the institution as a teaching body’ which was declining after the loss of the annual grant (MacSweeney and Reilly 1958, p.9).

Although non-denominational education was an ardent concern for many RCI members, the terrain of Irish educational reform was littered with opposition to this type of educational system. Both the Presbyterian and Anglican establishments were opposed to non-denominational education throughout the 1830s, and Catholic reaction switched from neutrality to hostility in a similar timeframe. The later Colleges Bill that brought the Queen’s College at Cork into existence was given minority Catholic support from Bishops Murray and Crolly. But a majority of the Catholic hierarchy opposed the Bill, as did Daniel O’Connell, who argued that ‘the principle of Catholicity places in the Episcopacy the superintendent of Catholic education’ (Clifford, 1992, p. 4; See also Akenson 1970). As such, non-denominational education – for Wyse, Bullen and Roche, a panacea – was contested by the hierarchies of the three largest religious denominations in Ireland. This continued throughout the nineteenth century, even after QCC had been established. Murphy notes, too, that ‘the Roman Catholic clergy continued to vilify the Queen’s University and its colleges as citadels of infidelity and indifferentism’. In fact, the Queen’s Colleges’ ‘middle’ or neutral position on religion was regarded as being even more objectionable than Trinity College’s Anglicanism, and the Holy See condemned the principle of non-denominational education for its ‘grievous and intrinsic dangers’ (Murphy 1995).

Despite the denominational campaigns against QCC, the Colleges (Ireland) Act was enacted in 1845, and all the demands of the RCI and Munster Provincial College Committee were met. Cork, Galway and Belfast were selected as the locations for the new colleges. It has been suggested that Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel's desire for non-denominational colleges, the active campaign in Munster, and the high profile BAAS meeting, were influential in securing Cork as the site for the southern college (Akenson 1970).

The visit of the BAAS to Cork: prior concerns

It is clear that the RCI's invitation to the BAAS appealed to the political and religious ambitions of a number of prominent men in the RCI who wanted to draw attention to both the healthy state of intellectual life in Cork City, and the broader QCC campaign. This was tied to their view that non-denominational education provided a solution to rampant sectarianism. It is no surprise to find that politics and religion played a similar role in discussions amongst the BAAS's leadership in their consideration of Cork as a host city for the Association.

It is difficult to discuss nineteenth-century Ireland without reference to politics, and in 1843 the visiting members of the BAAS had to face exactly that problem. Despite a dedication to the avoidance of political topics, the Association's members had political views of their own, especially on the topic of the repeal of the Act of Union that had united the kingdoms of Ireland and Britain in 1801. The threat posed by political disruption had the potential to disturb the meeting, and made the BAAS's leadership anxious about visiting Ireland.

To better understand why leading members were deeply concerned about a trip to Cork, it is useful to recall that liberal Anglicanism was the dominant creed of the BAAS's leadership in its early days. This creed linked politics and religion – largely liberal Whig tendencies and varieties of moderate Anglicanism – together (Hilton 1994). Frank Turner has defined the liberal Anglicanism, typical of the BAAS's leadership, as characterised by its support for the 'political and social status quo', Paleyeian natural theology and, importantly, the 'avoidance of any connection of respectable science with political radicalism' (Turner 1993, pp.55-56). It is little wonder, then, that the BAAS leadership quickly grew anxious about the political situation in Ireland when the possibility of visiting Cork was first aired.

Concerns were first expressed in June 1842 when, prior to the Cork delegation submitting the official invitation to the BAAS at the Manchester meeting of 1842, Roderick Murchison wrote to Vernon Harcourt, the Association's founder. 'Cork!' he explained

is the only antagonistic place to York and as yet we can find not one reason for going to the south of Ireland where there is not one savant and no machinery scientific. It was unanimously resolved at our Council of yesterday that Cork was to be thrown overboard and York approved of (Morrell and Thackray 1984, p.353).

Murchison attacked Cork's scientific and intellectual infrastructure, yet these pragmatic concerns masked deeper anxieties. Political turmoil in Ireland had the potential to disrupt the meeting, and both he and Harcourt were wary that the largely Anglican BAAS would be viewed as pro-Union, and a threat.

The two men were not alone in rejecting the RCI's invitation; it appears that the General Council was almost unanimously against the selection of Cork for the 1843 meeting of the British Association. Discussion on the location of the meeting had been heated. William Whewell, in his address to the general committee at Manchester 1842, summarised the options open to the Association: return to York, the site of the first meeting of the Association, suspend the Association for a year, or extend the peripatetic cycle to pastures new (*Literary Gazette*, July 1842). York was the favourite, and early arrangements were being made to repeat the successful 1831 assembly.

But at the same meeting of the General Committee in 1842, two invitations were read from York and seventeen from Cork, with the Cork application represented by William Cooke Taylor and the Mayor, Thomas Lyons. Sir William Rowan Hamilton and fellow Irish mathematician Professor John Stevelly moved in favour of Cork against the Marquis of Northampton – Spencer Compton – and Sir David Brewster. After a short debate the Marquis withdrew his motion and Cork was selected (*Athenaeum*, 2 July 1842, p.597). The move surprised the Council as preparations for York had already begun; nevertheless votes had been cast, Cork was to be the next venue for the BAAS. The defeated Marquis congratulated the Cork contingent, and addressing the assembled audience noted that science was 'a bond of union among all nations, and the best promoter of peace and amity – (applause)'; the selection of Cork was a form of 'justice [for] Ireland' (*Literary Gazette*, 1328, July 1842, p.463). The Marquis' remarks can be read as a bid to diffuse the anxieties that many leading members harboured about a visit to Cork, and to placate those in Ireland quick to associate the BAAS with an anti-Repeal and broadly Protestant cause.

The anxieties of the members now had to be set aside. Local preparations for the BAAS's visit to Cork began early, with busy meetings chaired by the Lord Lieutenant of Cork, the Earl of Bandon (RCI Minute Book, 10 November 1842). Among the gentlemen of science, the Association's founders, real concern remained over the political turmoil in Ireland and the potential effect on the Association's proceedings. The Repeal Association, led by Daniel O'Connell, had organised a series of large demonstrations, known as Monster Meetings, across the country calling for the restoration of the Irish parliament and full Catholic involvement in it. The largest of these meetings at Tara, County Meath, the ancient site of the High Kings of Ireland, had over 750,000 people in attendance and took place only two days before the August 17th gathering of the Association. It was in this context that Humphrey Lloyd, Provost of Trinity, wrote to Whewell in June, expressing his concern that this 'Hibernian fever' would reach its height before the 'peaceful meeting' of the BAAS. Long-time general secretary of the Association John Phillips, who went to Cork early to make preparations, was also

worried. He noted that 'the Repeal agitation is quiet in public but seems raging in private', and expressed a need for all parties 'to look with very direct eyes on the narrow band of science on which these fiery spirits may meet [to avoid] duelling' (Morrell and Thackray 1984, p.254).

In contrast to these privately-expressed reservations, commentary in the periodical press was more optimistic. An editorial in the *Literary Gazette* predicted that 'Cork, happily relieved from the excitement of local, municipal or national politics' would 'enjoy a rational and social period'. While the BAAS were in Cork the 'arts and sciences and the friendly intercourse which sweetens life will admit no trace of adverse opinions or angry passions to ruffle or disturb the science' (*Literary Gazette*, 1386, August 1843, p.529). Indeed, they argued that the city was unlikely to offer up any controversy as 'the tranquillity of the country and city of Cork' had been 'proverbial in the worst and most excited periods'. Earlier the same author had remarked that the BAAS visitors were so enthused with the thought of seeing Lord Rosse's telescope at Parsonstown, in County Offaly, that it vanquished 'all the slight fears or scruples felt on this side of the water about the political confusion in Ireland'. And they hoped that this

assemblage of distinguished men of all parties and opinions, eschewing the strife of politics and polemics, and joining cordially together for the advancement of science and the universal good of mankind, may produce a sedative effect upon more excited spirits, too long, perhaps engrossed, and provoked by topics of controversy and difference; so that the meeting of the British Association will, independent of its influx of local expenditure, be a positive blessing to the whole country (*Literary Gazette*, 1385, August 1843, p.512).

In fact Cork *was* quiet, and so sedate prior to the BAAS visit that the local authorities had considered transferring prisoners from the City Jail to the County Jail as 'two establishments... were found to be utterly unnecessary', such was the city's placidity (*Cork Constitution*, 1 August 1843, n.p.).

Impartiality, Science and a Poor Turnout

Prior concerns among the leadership of the BAAS over the political tension in Ireland, if they were known about at all, did not dampen the enthusiasm of the local organising secretaries. As the Association met, anticipation for the proceedings was high. The organisers had arranged a packed programme of 'glittering ... lectures, soirees, *conversazioni*, excursions and grand balls' (Pettit 1977, p.226). The Sections met in the imposing Imperial Hotel and various commercial and civic buildings and, in keeping with Withers (2010a), the local area shaped, in part, the scientific agenda, with papers on Cork geology, agriculture and natural history. The evening entertainment was hosted at the Corn Exchange, and featured Richard Owen discussing his discovery of the *Dinornis Giganteus*, and an exhibition of 'philosophical instruments', models, machinery, including

a modified jacquard loom (*Illustrated London News*, 26 August 1843). County Cork had a long association with the weaving industry. The majority of visitors, including Charles Dickens, had arrived in Cork via steamer, which remained in the harbour to transport the members on excursions around the county.

Yet, for those reflecting on the visit, the meeting was only a ‘partial success’; it had not lived up to the hype, despite attendance by distinguished men such as the astronomer and President the Earl of Rosse, Thomas Davis, William Rowan Hamilton, and Charles Lyell (Morrell and Thackray 1984, p.357). Roderick Murchison went further, noting that the BAAS ‘were never so near shipwreck as at this Cork meeting’ (Geikie 1875, p.18). The treasurer declined to read out the receipts collected during the proceedings given the low turnout, owing to less than 400 savants having attended (*Literary Gazette*, 1389, September 1843, p.556; *Athenaeum*, 16 September 1843, p.844). The science presented was deemed unremarkable; although Darwin, who did not attend, noted that while ‘the geology department of the Brit. Assoc struck [him as] rather poor ... the other sections [were] very interesting: Zoology was better than it usually was’ (Charles Darwin to Charles Lyell, letter no. 696, 1843).

The Irishman William Rowan Hamilton, one-time local secretary at the 1835 Dublin meeting, ‘greatly rejoiced that they [the Association] had come ... for the pleasure of all Ireland and Cork’, but his view was not widely shared. Commentary in *The Times* viewed the visit differently, noting that the BAAS will leave Cork, ‘the renowned city where an old woman once lived’, in the same state as they found it, ‘in all respects except a little temporary rise in the market price of provisions’ (*The Times*, 24 August 1843, p.4). Many locals were also unimpressed with the Association. Pat Daly, in the *Cork Constitution*, satirised the ‘MIMBERS OF THE BRITSHIS ASOSASHUN [sic],’ taunting them with a query of ‘whither it was less fataging to corry [their coat] on the back or undher the arm and which if yer rivrences will tell us, and sind yer opinion to the Edaihur of the Constitushun before nixt Thursday, we will be much sarved’ (*Cork Constitution*, 10 August 1843). The often-aggrieved and eccentric Cork mathematician John Walsh attacked the BAAS: ‘hurrah for Hibernia, the land of Virgilius,’ he remarked, ‘and down with the Philosophers and their barbarous lying Philosophy’ (*Cork Constitution*, 10 August 1843, n.p; Boole 1851, p.358).

The anticipation prior to the Association’s visit that the political agitation in Ireland would affect the meeting was realised in the poor attendance at the sectional discussions and evening Ordinaries. Although the disruption never occurred, the mere rumour ‘deterred many English and foreigners from attending’ (*Cork Examiner*, 16 September 1843, n.p.). Further, there was an almost total absence of Cork county citizens and country gentlemen (*Cork Examiner*, 23 August 1843). Cork Mayor Ludlow Beamish lamented this sorry state, expressing his anger at the ‘apathy exhibited by the gentlemen of the county of Cork, who had not shown the interest in the Association, which the value of its labours and their own position as country gentlemen ought to have suggested’ (*Athenaeum*, 24 August 1843, p.782).

Cork native, and leading member of the Association, William Cooke Taylor was angry at the poor turn-out from his countrymen, who had invited the BAAS

but, with their ‘dereliction of duty’, had failed to ‘come forward to fulfil their moral obligation’. Indeed, he claimed to have heard that ‘many had been deterred because it had been foretold that the meeting would be a failure’, sarcastically adding that ‘in these days of free trade, Heaven could not retain its monopoly of prediction, for a race of prophets had stirred up who foretold evil and zealously exerted themselves to procure the fulfilment of their prophecies’ (*Cork Examiner*, 23 August 1843; see also the *Literary Gazette*, 1388, August 1843, pp.542-3).

One suspected reason for the absence of members was the high price of tickets, which angered many of the individuals who had supported the BAAS’s visit since the first RCI meeting on the subject in 1842. Charles Lyell, in a letter to his sister in September 1843, saw the failure differently, attributing it

entirely to the gentry of the neighbourhood and county holding off, except the Lord Lieutenant and a few others who originally joined the town in inviting us. The reasons for this was that the townspeople, comprising many rich merchants and most of the tradesmen, were Repealers, and the agitation having occurred since we were invited, the opposite parties could never in Ireland act or pull together (Lyell 1881, p.254).

In effect, the County of Cork’s anti-Repealers refused to unite with the Cork City pro-Repealers. Ironically, the anti-Union locals welcomed the British Association, whose very presence in Ireland was symbolic of the Act of Union (Morrell and Thackray 1981, p.254). Although it is impossible to be sure as to why the local Repealers turned out in such force, it appears they desired to draw attention to the lively intellectual scene in Cork, its demands for a College, or even to prove that the Irish were not as backward as some BAAS members suggested (*The Nation*, 2 September 1843, n.p.).

Despite the fact that the anticipated clash between pro- and anti-Repealers never occurred, the Association’s meeting was not without discord. Central to this was the introduction of a number of partisan political affirmations from the visiting gentlemen.

Before the Association had even arrived in Cork, an unnamed member of the RCI wrote to the *Cork Constitution* on the 5th of August, recognising the potential for political agitation and pleading for its avoidance. It is, they claimed, ‘unnecessary to dwell upon the paramount importance of laying aside, if it be only for the next three weeks, every feeling of difference, local, personal, or political, which can possibly distract our councils or impair our strength’. It is

only by the most perfect harmony and union of sentiment, that we can hope effectively to work this gigantic machine, and we should esteem, as so we are confident would every right thinking man in the community, any failure on this occasion through individual feeling, to be nothing short of a national disgrace (*Cork Constitution*, 5 August 1843, n.p.).

Clearly the author was worried about the potential for trouble. Yet Morrell and Thackray have gone as far as to argue that, in 1843, the Association could justifiably claim their science to be ‘above party polemics’ as they had established distinct ‘boundaries between true science and partisan passion’. Precisely because, Morrell and Thackray claim, the pro- and anti-Repealers had avoided each other, the Cork meeting had been ‘harmonious’ (Morrell and Thackray 1981, p.254). But this is not quite true. Evidence from Cork suggests that partisan politico-religious discourse seeped into Association business, despite continued affirmations to the contrary, and tainted the BAAS’s supposedly non-partisan speech space.

At the first Ordinary in the Cork Corn Exchange, a general evening meeting, the President, the Earl of Rosse, rose and proclaimed how it was ‘impossible to address such a meeting without feelings of delight – a meeting assembled for scientific and useful purposes and where politics were totally excluded’ (*Literary Gazette*, August 1843, p.543). Similarly, during his presidential address, he claimed that he was gratified that ‘at a meeting so large (and in this country too)’ politics had been ‘altogether excluded’ (BAAS 1844, p.1). Within a sectional meeting, and during a discussion on the future of the RCI in light of the loss of its government funding, it was noted that

with respect to the RCI to which the chairman had alluded [...] under present circumstances, that was a topic dangerous to dwell upon – it involved political considerations, and those, by their rules they should avoid (loud cries of hear). The noble Marques [,] on the right hand of the chairman when the deputation waited on the council in Manchester [,] obtained a promise from that deputation that politics and dangerous topics should be excluded for the one week at least from the deliberations of their meetings in Cork (hear, hear) (*Cork Examiner*, 23 August 1843, n.p.).

Yet, these frequent affirmations, and the attempt to delimit the boundaries of the Association’s speech space, contrast sharply with the actual language and topics of conversation in the sectional meetings, Ordinaries and evening soirees of the BAAS. For example, at the Ordinary, the Earl of Rosse, who resided in Offaly, was introduced by the Marquis of Northampton, an Englishman, as his ‘own fellow countryman ... for he could not acknowledge that England and Ireland were not in reality the same (cheering) – the seas, it was true separated their persons, but their hearts, nevertheless, were united (further applause)’ (*Literary Gazette*, August 1843, p.542). At the same meeting, after grace was said, several toasts were offered, with the chairman enthusiastically raising his glass to both ‘her majesty the Queen – (three times three and enthusiastic cheering)’ followed by ‘the Army and the Navy... (cheers)’. Lord Mountcashel, too, punctured the BAAS’s impartial veneer and violated the speech space by lamenting the poor attendance, commenting that ‘it was a fact that could not be denied – [the Irish] were always backward (hear, hear, and laughter)’ (*Cork Examiner*, 23 August 1843, n.p.). The Marquis

of Northampton injected even more political rhetoric when he commented on the Repeal situation. The Association had ‘come to a country’ where there were ‘some difference of opinion’ on ‘certain questions’ among those who ‘he had the honour to address’. But, to the Marquis, these political questions should be swept aside. The promotion of science led to prosperity and ‘civilisation’, and the meeting had contributed towards the ‘national greatness and glory’ (*The Southern Reporter*, 19 August 1843, n.p.). The allusion to Ireland and Britain as one nation was cheered, although this comment upset the local media. Indeed, the welcoming attitude of the commentary in the local *Cork Examiner* shifted over the week, reflecting the continual political commentary by members of the Association. It remarked that

the speeches were not above the average. The Marquis of Northampton was pleased to trench a little on the tabooed ground of politics. He spoke of England and Ireland as being one. Lord Northampton jumped too quickly to a conclusion. We advise his lordship not to pronounce judgement until he shall have made himself better acquainted with the subject to which he refers. At all events we do not admire the intrusion of politics or political allusions on the audience among whom were very many of conflicting political opinions.

The *Cork Examiner* objected wholeheartedly to the injection of politics into what was supposed to be a non-partisan space. By the August 31st edition of the paper, however, the local media had come to somewhat of a compromise. In their eyes, the pursuit of both liberty and learning had been adopted by the French and, the editorial argued, Cork should follow this example. It noted that:

Whilst the Hills of Tara, sacred for ages, resounded with the glad shout of a MILLION AND A HALF OF MEN determined to strike off the slavish chains of centuries forged by English oppression – the public Halls of Cork re-echo the voices of the sage, the philosopher, and the man of science, engaged in bestowing the fruits of human learning and the results of human science upon Irishmen and Irish women [...] liberty and science advance *pari passu* through the land (*Cork Examiner*, 31 August 1843, n.p.).

By embracing the benevolence of Buckland, Herschel, Sedgwick and Henslow, the *Cork Examiner* argued, national prosperity and liberty would be secured. Despite their political differences, they recognised the potential benefits of the meeting. By contrast, the Young-Irelander, and editor of *The Nation*, Thomas Davis, saw the situation differently and in starkly nationalistic terms: ‘we like not the cosmopolitan who, in embracing the universal mankind, forget their closer affinity with their own country’. Although in attendance at the meeting, Davis was unimpressed with the ‘Radical Philosophers’ who ‘would benefit the world by

breaking down everything worthy of reverence, and building up instead a system of undigested crudities, with Jeremy Bentham as the Allah and Roebuck as the Mohammed of their veneration' (*The Nation*, 2 September 1843).

These select examples from Cork illustrate the extent to which the Association, as a purportedly non-political and non-religious rhetorical space, was undermined by visiting members commenting on the political agitation of Repeal Ireland. This is perhaps unsurprising or even unremarkable; of course the visiting gentlemen of science would feel the need to comment on the political agitation, especially as it had the potential to threaten the meeting. Yet the extent of the responses in the pages of the nationalist *Cork Examiner*, in particular, illustrate that the intrusion of political commentary, and the inherent bias towards British interests, did not pass unnoticed.

In sum, the scientific societies of Cork tried to avoid the intrusion of 'dissension and prejudices' into their meetings by prohibiting the discussion of politics and religion. The Association placed similarly restraints on speech. Yet, in the 'colleges controversy' we can see how political disputes were strongly influenced by religious interests, and even Bullen and Wyse's political campaign for non-denominational education was underpinned by particular religious views regarding control of education. Similarly, when the BAAS visited the Catholic context of Cork County and City, its commitment to objectivity was placed under severe strain by the political and religious partisanship and character of its membership. Indeed, the Association's own tacit rules and regulations that regulated its speech space were repeatedly broken by the visiting members.

Sermons on science: Catholics, liberal Anglicanism and natural theology

Alongside their religiously-inflected politics, many of the Association's members brought a number of more explicit religious views to Cork. This is unsurprising. As we have seen, the dominant outlook of the BAAS's leadership and many of its members was the politico-religious creed of liberal Anglicanism. Although this label should not be accepted uncritically, there was congruence between a latitudinarian approach to the relations between science and religion and Whig liberalism. As Boyd Hilton notes, liberal Anglicanism was mainly a Whig 'political phenomenon in the 1830s', and consisted of views such as the 'admitting of dissenters into English universities, Catholic emancipation and non-sectarian reform of education' (Hilton 1994, p.830). The liberal Anglican position broadly embodied a 'constitutional moralism ... based on [the] ideal of an established church which would teach the moral worth of Christianity without being doctrinally exclusive' (Hilton 1994, p.830). Underpinning this was a commitment to natural theology (Morrell and Thackray 1981).

During the Cork meeting there were a number of statements supporting this brand of liberal Anglicanism, and their prominence in presidential speeches, official functions and other meetings may have suggested that the leadership of the Association saw them as legitimate (Morrell and Thackray 1981). In fact, the public may have attached particular importance to statements made by key BAAS

members in the speech space of official functions, and taken any pronouncements as being the view of the entire Association. As far back as 1833, David Brewster had complained of this process of 'backdoor' approval, and had warned of its dangers. The 'schemes of the Association are only suggestions of individuals, who propose them at general committee' he observed, yet they 'are then read at a public meeting not assembled for discussion, and pass unnoticed as the decrees of the aggregate wisdom of British science!' (BAAS 1833, p.394). Some importance, therefore, must be attached to these statements (Toal 2013). One prominent instance was the Earl of Rosse's presidential address, in which he outlined a subtle, latitudinarian, formulation of the relations between science and religion.

The Earl, William Parsons, was a highly respected astronomer whose telescope, the *Leviathan* at Parsonstown (now Birr), was the largest in the world in the 1840s and an attraction for many visiting BAAS members. He was a member of the ascendancy, but his political and religious views, his support for moderate Catholic emancipation and Whig liberalism, align him with the liberal Anglicanism, which dominated the Association in the early years (Morrell and Thackray 1981). Rosse's presidential address is littered with subtle theological references, relating to both natural theology and the connection between the Creator and the work of the Association.

In his address, Rosse remarked that the BAAS advanced science through 'the love of truth' and through 'the engrossing nature of a pursuit so exalted as that of diving into the wonders of creation'. Science, in Rosse's eyes, brought humanity closer to God. Indeed, he preached a natural theology towards the end of his short discourse, quoting the travel-writer George Borrow's observation that 'the children of the fields' had 'a more determined tendency to religion and piety than amongst the dwellers in towns and cities'. The reasons were obvious: 'the inhabitants of the country were less accustomed to the works of man's hands than to those of God' and the minds of city dwellers were more liable to be 'led astray by the habitual contemplation of the works of man, forced upon it imperceptibly by the continual succession of ideas – all of the same character – all originating in objects which have been shaped and fashioned by man' (BAAS 1844, p.xxxiii). To Rosse, the peripatetic wanderings of the Association afforded the savants an opportunity to escape the pernicious influence of the city and come closer to the works of God. His handiwork was apparent across the rural provinces of Britain and Ireland. By implication, knowing God's works would lead to knowledge of God. Continuing, Rosse queried whether there was anything 'more calculated' to

unbend the mind, and to divert for a season the current of ideas into other channels, than these periodical meetings, where in the proceedings of every section, matter will be found of the deepest interest to every true philosopher; and where, however dissimilar the facts, however varied the inferences, the result will everywhere be still the same – that of putting forward more prominently in bold relief the wonderful works of creation? (BAAS 1844, pp.xxxi-xxxiii)

There was little reaction to Rosse's address in Cork at the time of the meetings, and few perhaps could have been offended by his latitudinarian sentiments. Yet, even if no objections were voiced in Cork, there was plenty of scope for others elsewhere to query the religious impartiality of the BAAS and, particularly, Rosse's use of natural theology.

In its early years, the Association unofficially embraced a form of natural theology that sought to unite a vast spectrum of believers under a doctrinally imprecise banner. By utilising natural theology, the leadership hoped to bring together men of science and avoid strife. Yet, as Jon Topham's revisionist account of nineteenth-century natural theology has revealed, natural theology was not a neutral discourse, and did not – could not – provide a stable 'common context' for all believers to unite under (Topham 1998).

Clearly then, what the gentlemen of science meant by avoiding religious topics did not entail the exclusion of theological claims, as natural theology was itself a theological proposition. Rather, they aimed to create a rhetorical space defined by a broad, Christian, middle way that sought to accommodate a multifarious range of denominational affiliations, from Quakers to Anglicans. Reflecting this, throughout the 1830s and 1840s and beyond, presidential addresses were often littered with deferential acknowledgements of the God of nature. They were non-denominational, but they were still regarded by some as deeply partisan. Anglo-Catholics, for example, had an ambiguous relationship with this form of natural theology, as did many Scots Presbyterians (O'Leary 2006). John Henry Newman, writing as a high-church Anglican, objected outright to this division, which was antithetical to his 'theology of nature'. For Newman, espousing the rationalistic natural theology so often supported by the BAAS was a slippery slope towards pantheism and atheism (Orange 1975, see also Newman 1909). For many evangelicals, the version of natural theology underwritten by the BAAS separated science from religion, where they would have viewed the two as joined (Morrell and Thackray 1981).

Reflecting these concerns, an article in *The Times* around the time of the Cork meeting attacked the lack of respect shown to religious doctrine in the BAAS. The author focused particularly on a quip delivered during a sectional discussion in which a joke was made at the expense of Adam and Eve and the doctrine of The Fall. It was noted that the tone of the Association 'has been objectionable' and the Association have 'not always taken a line on some subjects that a religious nation should approve of'. Its policy of separating religion and science was attacked. If science was 'really to enlarge and expand the mind, if it is to perform its part in the work of real education' the author doubted 'whether it should be mere science, beginning and ending with itself'. Humanity, in the author's eyes, needed more than 'mere science', it needed a moral and religious system to understand and mediate knowledge.

In the same article, the author condemned the Association's lack of explicit religiosity, adding that:

We quarrel with them for the way in which they seem to nip all such enlarging tendencies in science in the very bud; for having, by their self complacent perfectly-contented adoration of gases and gallipots for their own sake, done what they could to make physical science an illiberal line of knowledge and prejudice all respectable and serious minds against it (*The Times*, 24 August 1843, p.4).

The BAAS had been responsible for separating science and religion, at least rhetorically, and this, the author claimed, had made science not only illiberal, but had turned individuals against it.

In Cork, no such comments were made, or at least they are not recoverable. In part, this is a function of geography. Although Cork was well served by two local newspapers, it lacked the press machinery and breadth of coverage of previous host towns, like Manchester or Newcastle (see Morrell and Thackray 1981). The Association's visit did, however, provide an occasion for local clergy to address the subject of the relationship between science and religion. For example, the following advertisement for a sermon was placed in *The Southern Reporter* in the week preceding, and during, the BAAS's visit. It read:

“Relations of Christianity and Modern science”

Sermon to be preached on Sunday the 20th and 27th at the independent chapel by Alexander King. Focusing on the ‘harmonious claims of natural and revealed religion’ (*The Southern Reporter*, 17 August, 1843, n.p.).

King was a Wicklow-born minister of the Independent Chapel on Great George's Street, Cork. He was originally confirmed into the Established Church, but formed dissenting opinions after a period of study in Dublin Theological College (Fish 1875, p.765). From this point, he identified as an anti-Rome evangelical and was involved in the Munster movement for the Queen's Colleges campaign, publishing *The Might and the Right of the People* in support (*The Southern Reporter* 7 March 1843, King 1875). It is noteworthy that King chose to advertise and preach his sermon at the same time as the BAAS's meeting, and on the topic of the ‘harmonious claims of natural and revealed religion’. In doing so, he was using the spectacle of the visit as an opportunity to promote his own theological and, perhaps, political views. Although his sermon does not survive, we can surmise that it lent support to the Association. Here he was, after all, proclaiming the value of science, and its harmony with religion, while Britain and Ireland's largest peripatetic scientific organisation was in the city.

Another, perhaps more surprising statement, on the relationship between science and religion was given in a sermon by the Rev. Dr Thomas Olliffe, a Catholic Cork native who had just returned from a mission in Bengal. Olliffe was the Vicar General of Bengal at the time, and his brother, Joseph Olliffe was presenting a paper to the Medical Section of the 1843 meeting (*The Southern*

Reporter, 29 August 1843, n.p., on Olliffe see MacNalty 1965). Thomas, a Jesuit, later took possession of the Vicariate of Western Bengal. Olliffe gave his address to the Association on the connection between science and religion as the members gathered before embarking upon their day-trip to Youghal, Co. Cork. He began by arguing that there was ‘not a sceptic in existence who would call into question’ the proposition ‘that there is a connexion between the creature and the Creator’ and ‘therefore there is a connection between science and religion’. For

what is science, but the knowledge of nature, or of the creature, under its various aspects? And what is religion, but not only the binding, but the *rebinding* [...] of the creature to his God? If, therefore, science be the knowledge of the creature, and if Religion be the bond between the creature and the creator, surely it in-disputably follows that there is a connexion between science and religion?

To Olliffe, science and religion were intimately linked along a continuum, with science revealing knowledge of ‘Man’ – the creature – while religion revealed the relationship between ‘Man’ and God. Continuing, Olliffe outlined his own natural theology. ‘Could it’, he enquired, be ‘possible to study any of the laws of nature without recurring immediately to the existence of the author, the great and almighty being who ruled and governed the universe?’ (*The Southern Reporter*, 29 August 1843, n.p., original emphasis). This was classic Paleyeian natural theology, similar to Rosse, although much more explicit.

Olliffe kept this line of thought, drawing on recent discoveries in physics and zoology that illustrated the existence of a ‘divine legislator’. Despite an auspicious start, Olliffe deviated into more controversial subjects by claiming that recent geological discoveries proved the truth of the ‘universal catastrophe’, the Mosaic deluge. Thus, not only did Olliffe advocate a classical form of natural theology, but also a close, literal reading of scripture. This was contentious; the Association had a difficult relationship with proponents of a literal exegesis of the Bible (Morrell and Thackray 1981, p.229ff.).

Olliffe concluded his short address by exhorting all ‘members of the British Association, not only those who are present, but also those who are absent, to continue their undying energies in the pursuit of every branch of science’ and not to stray from God. While the BAAS is ‘thus laudably engaged’ while it is ‘fathoming the mysteries of nature’, its members should not forget ‘the author of nature, the creator of all’ (*The Southern Reporter*, 29 August 1843, n.p.).

Olliffe’s sermon is significant for a variety of reasons, not least for the fact that he was asked to preach to the Association by the members organising its visit (*The Southern Reporter*, 29 August 1843, n.p.). He was actively encouraged to address the assembly prior to its departure on the field trip to seaside Youghal on the Friday following the BAAS’s week – which in itself demonstrates the fragile nature of the Association’s commitment to the regulation of a non-partisan speech space. Perhaps most intriguing was the content of Olliffe’s address. The

sermon was, at least superficially, doctrinally unaligned – it was not obviously Catholic, and it relied heavily on natural theology. This is curious, certainly when he is placed in context. He was a Catholic missionary, originally from Cork but permanently relocated to Bengal, who preached a doctrinally unaligned sermon within a majority Catholic town, county and region.

Unpacking Olliffe's sermon is difficult, but it is safe to assume that Olliffe was not a typical Catholic priest. Although little is known of him, he was invited as a special guest on the excursion, and was introduced as a 'distinguished Ecclesiastic' at a general meeting during the Association's proceedings (*Cork Examiner*, 28 August 1843, n.p.). As an illustration of his background, his physician brother was both a Knight of the French Légion d'honneur and the British Empire (Boase 2011). Also, what he said, or what he was prepared to say, was not typical of Irish Catholic priests of the time – Catholics were much 'less reliant' on natural theology as an argument, while some were suspicious of it (O'Leary 2006). Whether his missionary experience had helped him develop this somewhat conciliatorily style of preaching is not clear, although possible.

Olliffe was a prominent personality – he was Bishop of Bengal, after all – but, importantly, he was also a Catholic. Morrell and Thackray have argued that the Association's leadership was keen to include individuals from other religious groups to demonstrate that the BAAS 'spoke for science, not simply for a party within the Church of England' (Morrell and Thackray 1981, p.228). In Catholic Cork – with the Unionists avoiding the meeting, and pro-Repealers in large attendance – Olliffe, in the Association's eyes, may have been the 'safest' choice to preach. An Anglican minister, for example, would likely have received a very different reception.

It is worth noting that, to a degree, the Catholic Olliffe obeyed the unwritten protocol of the BAAS speech space – his sermon was curtailed or shaped in such a way as to appeal to the broader spectrum of Association attendees without promoting one particular doctrine. The Association's leadership had demonstrated that doctrinal imprecision was central to mass appeal, and Olliffe tailored his speech in such a way as to win over the majority. On most counts, then, Olliffe carefully negotiated the Association's speech space. But, at the same time that he was appealing to a broader public through doctrinal imprecision, he was also, in a sense, pushing and challenging the BAAS's speech protocols. For example, his reference to Moses and the truth of the universal deluge was opposed to the broad views of the Association's leadership. Among the main critics of the BAAS in its early years were the Biblical literalists, (Hess and Allen 2008) or those that placed emphasis on a literal reading of the Pentateuch, yet this was antithetical to the views of the leadership who resisted shackling geology with a literal reading of Genesis (Orange 1975, Morrell and Thackray 1981). Thus, Olliffe tested the Association's speech space, which had excluded the scientific views of the scriptural geologists in the past. Perhaps, then, *where* Olliffe preached mattered, and maybe it is significant that Olliffe delivered this brief sermon 'in the field', away from more structured Association activities in Cork City. Had Olliffe

preached this sermon within a more closely policed Association speech space – at an official function in the Imperial Hotel or within the sections at the Cork Corn Exchange – he may well have received a different reception.

Besides drawing attention to the different, official and unofficial, spaces in which science-religion relations were voiced during the meeting, the examples of King and Olliffe tell us something about the distinct preaching culture that developed around the Association's meeting in the 1860s and 1870s but had not developed to the same extent in the 1840s (Toal 2012a). Unlike the later meetings of the Association in the 1860s and beyond – in which a range of preachers and church services were offered to the Association's members, unofficially, during the meeting – there were few in Cork. This absence reflects, I suggest, the local civic context of Cork. Anti-Union Catholics made up the bulk of the local attendance at the Cork meeting of the Association. Yet, Catholics placed much less emphasis on preaching than other denominations, and, when priests delivered their homilies, they followed distinct 'preaching cycles', focusing on doctrinal issues, the upholding of Papal authority, Catholic apologetics, or a syllabus that covered the Nicene Creed, the commandments, or key Gospel readings. Political and social commentary did not really appear until after the 1850s (Sheetz-Nguyen 2010).

The limited response to the political and religious sentiments of the Association, or Rosse's remarks, or even the unorthodox views of Olliffe – certainly in comparison to later meetings of the Association, for example, in the 1880s – reflects the civic and religious composition of Catholic Cork. Catholics just did not have the same preaching culture. In support of this, in ascendancy Dublin in 1835, an altogether disparate civic space, religious responses to the Association's visit were quite different. Here, there was a number of sermons preached in honour of the BAAS's visit but, again, none of the preachers were Catholics. Indeed, the first explicitly Catholic sermon relating to the Association was preached in 1897 in Toronto, despite the 1884 meeting of the Association in Catholic Montreal (see Toal, forthcoming).

Conclusion

Local circumstances played a central role in shaping the Association's thirteenth meeting. Just as the invitation to the BAAS was made by members of the RCI and the MPCC to bolster their regional initiative for the establishment of a college in Munster, the political geography of the area – the threat of Repeal – was enough to keep the pro-Union locals away from the meeting and almost bankrupt the Association. This underlines Withers' (2010a) argument that BAAS meetings were always 'geographically constituted': the towns and cities in which the Association met, made a difference to how proceedings played out.

At the same time, placing the campaign for a Munster college side by side with the visiting members' concerns over Repeal agitation has highlighted the close relationship between religion, science and politics. The MPCC's mission was political – non-denominational education was viewed as a panacea that

would cure sectarian strife – while the pro-Union views and Protestantism of the Association's membership cannot be separated. Recognising the direct impact either groups' politico-religious views had upon the proceedings, calls to mind Dixon's suggestion that more attention should be paid to the role of 'pre-existing political contexts' in shaping encounters. Science and religion are, of course, 'intellectual ideas', but they are also 'worldly practices', and they cannot be divorced from their local political contexts (Dixon 2010, pp.8-9). The political milieu must be a consideration when examining science-religion encounters in the Association.

Next, although the leadership attempted to steer its proceedings from controversy by flying under a banner of non-partisanship, this was difficult to police 'in the field', and the Associational speech space was repeatedly challenged by political and religious commentary. It is unsurprising, then, to learn that the Association never returned to Cork; its later visits to Ireland were confined to the safe and largely Protestant spaces of Dublin and Belfast.

At the same time, placing the Protestant BAAS against the rhetorical and material spaces of Catholic and nationalist Cork has also highlighted the fact that non-partisanship in the early days really embodied a range of political views tied to a form of Christianity which was in itself, theologically aligned and fiercely contested. Away from the comfortable and familiar spaces of Protestant Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh, it is clear that the BAAS struggled to maintain its claim of science 'unfettered by dogma'. Indeed, it could be argued that Catholic contexts have particular explanatory power in uncovering the subtly partisan nature of the BAAS. Certainly, the Association's visit to ultra-Catholic Montreal in 1884 raised similar concerns over Protestant bias in the leadership (see Toal, forthcoming). Recognising that the BAAS transformed 'in the field', and that its rhetorical claims to impartiality were spatially constituted and configured in different ways in different places, serves to underline the importance of mapping the geography of Associational science and religion. *Where* the Association met was fundamental in determining how proceedings played out, and how science-religion relations were configured, discussed and contested.

Finally, although recovering details about Olliffe's reception in Cork has proven difficult, his address still provides a useful case study in highlighting the protocols that conditioned talk about religion at Associational meetings, especially as his speech reflected neither his Catholic background, nor his location in the context of nationalist, Repeal Cork. Olliffe, to an extent, negotiated the Association's speech space by not only appealing to the broad latitudinarian construction of the science-religion relationship, but by avoiding specific doctrinal issues. Indeed, securing a Catholic Bishop to speak to the BAAS in Cork must have been viewed as quite a coup to the organisers. Much less agreeable, of course, was his injection of biblical literalism, which was so frowned upon. By this we can surmise that it was precisely Olliffe's general lack of 'local' commitments – he was from Cork, but he had spent his adult life in Bengal – that underscores the extent to which the BAAS meeting in Cork was shaped by a silenced 'other' – the Catholic, nationalist

Corkonian. The local, Catholic voice in 1843 is largely marginalised, and relegated to complaints and accusation of partisanship on behalf of the Association in the local media.

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